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Jews in Armenia in the Ancient Period (First Century BCE to Fifth Century CE)

2.1 Introductory Remarks

“It is most unlikely,” J. Russell writes, “that there were no Jews in earliest Armenia, since the exilic communities¹ were well established in Syria, northern Mesopotamia, and Media . . . for centuries. Nor need we suppose that it was impossible that some of them married Uartians and Armenians.”² This statement seems plausible, and one could add to it the possibility that some Jews came to Armenia from the neighboring kingdom of Adiabene, whose royal house converted to Judaism in the first century CE. Yet no evidence supporting either of these suppositions has survived in known sources that might provide us with documented connections to or information about such exiled Jews who took up residence in Armenia. Two further possibilities have been raised and will be discussed and refined in the present study: first, that Jews were brought to Armenia by the renowned king Tigran II in the framework of his policy of synoecism;³ second, that in Armenia there had developed a considerable number of Judaizers who were often reckoned with the Jewish community.⁴

The preserved evidence for Jews in Armenia is both scattered and episodic. The following chapters discuss the attestations known to us to their presence there during the Ancient and Medieval periods. The most prominent early historical reports relate to

the Hellenistic-Roman period, such as those retailed by P'awstos Buzand and Movsēs Xorenac'i,⁵ and from different perspectives by Josephus Flavius and Plutarch. They relate that Tigran II the Great settled Jews in Armenia in the first century BCE. Such direct reports are few and rare, but when they exist they are very good evidence, though of course subject to the critical reading that is demanded for the utilization of all historical sources.

In Armenian sources dating from the fifth and later centuries CE, there is considerable information about Jews in Armenia, or more precisely, the settlement of Jews in Armenia and the later expulsion of Jews from certain Armenian cities. Here we discuss this information in detail. Once assessed critically, this evidence makes it quite clear that there were Jews in Armenia, first attested in the first century BCE and clearly present by the fourth century CE.

2.2 The Oldest Evidence in Armenian Literature: Jews Deported from Armenia by the Persians (368/9 CE)

The first ancient Armenian literary source to mention Jewish population in Armenia is the *History of Armenia* ascribed to P'awstos Buzand,⁶ probably composed in the third quarter of the fifth century CE.⁷ The long passage (4.55) that refers to multitudes of Jewish families living in Armenian cities concerns one of the most disastrous and fateful events in the history of Armenia, namely the invasion and ravaging of the country by Persian troops circa 368/9.⁸ As a consequence of that invasion, almost all significant Armenian cities were ruined and devastated, and their inhabitants, who, according to P'awstos, were exclusively Armenians and Jews, were captured and taken to Persia. The historian speaks of more than ninety-five thousand Jewish families that were settled in seven Armenian cities: Artašat, Vałaršapat, Eruandašat, Zarehawan, Zarišat, Van, and Naxčawan. This campaign by the Persian king

Shāpūr II (reigned 309–379) formed the completion of a series of strenuous diplomatic and military actions. He directed these actions toward the subjection of the disobedient country following the peace agreement he concluded with the Roman emperor Flavius Jovian (363–364) in 363.

2.3 The Historical Background: The Events of 363–368/9

To clarify the context in which the Jewish families are mentioned, we must present briefly the sequence of events leading up to the Persian conquest of these Armenian cities. The most reliable description is by a contemporary eyewitness, the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus (ca. 330–395 CE).⁹ He relates that the emperor Julian (361–363 CE) crossed the river Euphrates and campaigned against Persia;¹⁰ King Arsaces of Armenia (Aršak II, ca. 350–368/9 CE) was Julian's ally (23.2). The Romans subjugated several towns and strongholds on their way (24.1, 2, 4, 5) and reached Ctesiphon, the winter capital of the Persian kings (24.6).¹¹ However, although here Julian's army won a brilliant victory, the Roman emperor and his generals decided not to besiege the city, regarding that as a "rash and untimely" undertaking, and so they retreated (24.7). Julian was killed in a subsequent battle (25.3),¹² and, "as if by the blind decree of fortune," Flavius Jovian, "a slothful, weak man," was chosen as emperor.¹³ Under the pressure of the starving and exhausted Roman soldiers, Jovian concluded a thirty-years' "shameful treaty" (*ignobile decretum*) with Shāpūr II, ceding to the Persians five provinces west of the Tigris and the cities Nisibis and Singara (25.7). Then Ammianus indicates what this agreement stipulated regarding Armenia (25.7.12).

Based on this agreement, some time later (in about 368/9) Shāpūr's army destroyed the seven Armenian cities and moved their Armenian and Jewish inhabitants to Persia. "To these

conditions,”¹⁴ Ammianus writes, “there was added another which was destructive and impious, namely, that after the completion of these agreements, Arsaces, our steadfast and faithful friend, should never, if he asked it, be given help against the Persians. This was contrived with a double purpose, that a man who at the emperor’s order had devastated Chiliocomum¹⁵ might be punished, and that the opportunity might be left of presently invading Armenia without opposition.”

The same events, Julian’s campaign, the Romans’ retreat, Julian’s death, and the conclusion of the peace treaty between Jovian and Šāpūr II, are also described in detail in the *Nea Historia* (3.12–31) of the early sixth-century Byzantine author Zosimus.¹⁶ He says (3.31.2) that, according to the treaty, “the Persians also took away most of Armenia, allowing the Romans to keep only a small part,” but this concerns more the aftermath of the truce than the agreement itself.

P’awstos Buzand, too, knows about the fatal treaty (4.21): “When peace came between the Greek king¹⁷ and Šapuh king of Persia,” he writes, “the Greek wrote a letter of covenant, sealed it, and sent it to the king of Persia. . . . ‘I give you,’ he said, ‘the city of Mcbin,¹⁸ which is in Aruestan, and Syrian Mesopotamia. And I am withdrawing from the Armenian Midlands. If you are able to attack and subject them, I shall not support them.’” P’awstos also states that the Roman emperor had to send such a letter to the king of Persia because he was in a difficult situation.

Further, P’awstos narrates that Šāpūr II waged war against Aršak II, king of Armenia. According to Hakob Manandian, this happened in the year 364 CE, and for four years the Armenians were able to resist the attacks of the powerful Persian army.¹⁹ Finally, as Ammianus witnesses, after deceitfully summoning Aršak to Persia and executing him,²⁰ Šāpūr conquered most of Armenia, including the royal stronghold Artogerassa (Artagers).²¹ Thus, the destruction of the seven cities and the capture of Armenians and Jews, to which chapter 4.55 of P’awstos’s *History of Armenia* bears

witness, should be viewed in the context of this last and victorious incursion of Shāpūr's armed forces into Armenia.

2.4 The Information on the Conquest of the Cities: Accurate or Legendary?

P'awstos Buzand's work is a very important source for the history of fourth-century Armenia.²² However, scholars have concluded that the book is largely based on oral traditions rather than on any written account,²³ and that it contains many inaccuracies and fabulous stories. Consequently, before dealing with the ethnicity and numbers of the deported inhabitants, we must first determine whether or not the main substance of P'awstos's testimony is rooted in reality. In other words, is it true that, in the fourth century, the cities of Artasat, Vałaršapat, Eruandašat, Zarehawan, Zarišat, Van, and Naxčawan were seized and destroyed by the Persians and their citizens taken captive?

Ammianus Marcellinus provides valuable information which, although for the most part lacking specific details, in general corroborates P'awstos's words. According to Ammianus, the result of the peace treaty "was that later . . . Arsaces was taken alive, and that the Parthians²⁴ amid various dissensions and disturbances seized a very great tract of Armenia bordering on Media, along with Artaxata" (25.7.12). Artaxata (Artasat) is the first of the seven cities listed by Buzand, and the "very great tract of Armenia" (*Armeniae maximum latus*) might well have included the other six.

Later, after his reference to Arsaces's (Aršak's) execution (27.12.3), Ammianus tells about the same encroachment of Shāpūr's troops into Armenia (368/9), resulting in the seizure and destruction of the royal fortress Artogerassa (27.12.11–12): "Sapor . . . mustering greater forces began to devastate Armenia with open pillage. . . . After burning the fruit-bearing

trees and the fortified castles and strongholds that he had taken by force or by betrayal, he blockaded Artogerassa with the whole weight of his forces and after some battles of varying result and the exhaustion of the defenders, forced his way into the city and set it on fire, dragging out and carrying off the wife and the treasures of Arsaces.”

Ammianus confirms the capture of Artaxata in the first passage cited earlier (25.7.12), and by “the fortified castles and strongholds” (*castella munita et castra*), which Shāpūr burned (27.12.12), he may have also meant Vałaršapat, Eruandašat, Zarehawan, Zarišat, Van, and Naxčawan. As to the deportation, ethnicity, and numbers of the inhabitants, one has to rely, as far as it is reasonable, on P’awstos Buzand’s and, additionally, on Movsēs Xorenac’i’s information.²⁵

2.5 P’awstos Buzand, 4.55

Then²⁶ Šapuh (Shāpūr) king of Persia sent two of his princes . . . against the realm of Armenia. . . . They came to the great city of Artašat and took it. They destroyed its wall, carried off the hoarded treasures that were there, and captured the entire city. And they carried off from the city of Artašat nine thousand Jewish households who had been taken prisoners by King Tigran Aršakuni out of the land of Palestine, and forty thousand Armenian families, whom they took from the city of Artašat. . . . They . . . destroyed every building in the city to its foundations . . . emptied it of all its population.²⁷

The same happens to six other Armenian cities: from Vałaršapat the Persians take away “nineteen thousand families,” adult men, women, and children; from Eruandašat, they take away twenty

thousand Armenian families and thirty thousand Jewish families; from Zarehawan in Bagrewand they take away five thousand Armenian families and eight thousand Jewish families; from Zarišat, in the district of Aġiovit, they take away fourteen thousand Jewish families and ten thousand Armenian families; from Van, in the district of Tozb, they take away five thousand Armenians and eighteen thousand Jewish families; and from Naxčawan, they take away two thousand Armenian families and sixteen thousand Jewish families. Naxčawan is also the gathering place of the Persian army and of all other captives, who are then taken to Persia, to King Shāpūr II.

Table 2.1 lists the cities and the captured inhabitants according to P'awstos.

Table 2.1 The Cities and the Numbers of Their Captured Armenian and Jewish Inhabitants according to P'awstos Buzand

City name	Province	Number of Jewish families	Number of Armenian families	Number of families (ethnicity unspecified)
Artašat		9,000	40,000	
Vaġaršapat				19,000
Eruandašat		30,000	20,000	
Zarehawan	Bagrewand	8,000	5,000	
Zarišat	Aġiovit	14,000	10,000	
Van	Tozb	18,000	5,000	
Naxčawan		16,000	2,000	
		Total: 95,000	Total: 82,000	

2.6 What Do the Numbers Indicate and What Might “Jews” (Հրեայք) in P’awstos Buzand Mean?

As is evident from Table 2.1, among the cities mentioned, Armenians formed the large majority of those exiled only from Artašat, the most celebrated Armenian metropolis of the ancient world. Regarding Vałaršapat, the proportion of Jews to Armenians is not clear, for P’awstos gives only the total number of the citizens, without indicating their ethnicity.²⁸ In the other five cities the Jewish families, in various ratios, form the majority, which is especially striking in the cases of Van and Naxčawan. It is interesting that in the *History* by the ninth-tenth-century historian T’ovma Arcruni (1.10), the same numbers (five thousand and eighteen thousand) of the inhabitants of Van are given, but the number of Jews, on the contrary, is five thousand and of Christians (not “Armenians”!) is eighteen thousand.²⁹

P’awstos’s information, very likely not based on any documentary evidence but just acquired by word of mouth, should not be accepted at face value; no doubt, the numbers of both Armenian and especially Jewish inhabitants are greatly exaggerated. Nevertheless, Manandian concludes that in the days of Tigran and later on during the Arsacid reign, not the Armenians themselves but the foreign settlers, in the first place Jews and Syrians, played the leading role in the country’s commercial affairs.³⁰ Garsoïan infers that “the Armenians of this period were not city dwellers at any level of society,”³¹ and that the information provided by P’awstos shows “almost invariably that the Jews composed the majority of the early Armenian urban population.”³² These conclusions based on P’awstos Buzand are disputable and too categorical, but we can clearly state the following: if there were not considerable numbers of Jews in Armenia at the time of the Persian expedition of 368/9, P’awstos would not have mentioned them at all, and the large numbers, although exaggerated, indicate that the

Jewish settlement was substantial. Furthermore, one may also conjecture that even after the removal of those tens of thousands to Persia by Shāpūr II, Armenian Jewry had by no means become just a distant memory in the time of P'awstos. He was most probably led to speak of more than ninety-five thousand Jewish families involved in the tragic events of some hundred years before his time by the continuing existence of their descendants as a significant part of Armenia's population. This becomes more apparent when one deals with another early medieval Armenian literary source, namely the *History of Armenia* by Movsēs Xorenac'i³³ (discussed later), in which Jews often play quite a conspicuous role.

One should also suppose that the term "Jew" means both "Jews" and "Judaizers" rather than simply the ethnos, for otherwise the large numbers of "Jewish" captives and the odd division of the city-dwellers into only two groups, "Jews" and "Armenians," would be difficult to understand.³⁴ In this respect, the passage in Josephus Flavius's *War of the Jews* (BJ 2.462–464) describing the enmity between the two large groups of the inhabitants of Syrian cities is extremely interesting.³⁵ Speaking about the events preceding the great war against the Romans and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 BCE, Josephus writes that "every city was divided into two camps, and the safety of one party lay in their anticipating the other." Those two armies were "Syrians" (Σύριοι) and "Jews" (Ἰουδαῖοι). The former were massacring the latter, but among the Ἰουδαῖοι there were people whom the Syrians regarded with suspicion but were not determined to kill. Josephus calls them "Judaizers" (Ἰουδαῖζοντας) and characterizes them as "ambiguous" (ἀμφίβολον) and "mixed" (μεμιγμένον), unlike those who were clearly "alien" (ἀλλόφυλον), that is, ethnic Jews.³⁶ What Josephus says about the Ἰουδαῖοι in Syrian cities may well be true regarding the Armenian equivalent for "Jews" in P'awstos Buzand: հրէայք or հրէայք (հրէայ or հրէայ in singular) should be interpreted as "Jews and Judaizers," that is, people of other nations, presumably non-Armenians (because the Armenians form the other large group of

the seven cities), converted to Judaism. Needless to say, “becoming a Jew” was a widespread phenomenon in many countries of the civilized world throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods.³⁷

In scholarly literature, the various meanings of “Jew” (or “Judean”) and “Judaizer” are stressed. We would like to mention two comparatively new studies discussing those terms in detail. Louis H. Feldman speaks of “God-fearers” (φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν) and “sympathizers,” “those non-Jews who adopted certain Jewish practices without actually converting to Judaism.”³⁸ The story of the gradual conversion of Izates, king of Adiabene, told by Josephus (AJ 20.17ff.) is a good example of how a “sympathizer” becomes a proselyte. Shaye J. D. Cohen³⁹ distinguishes three main meanings for the Hebrew *Yehudi*, Greek *Ioudaios*, and Latin *Judaeus*: (1) ethnic/geographic, (2) religious/cultural, and (3) political (“a citizen or ally of the Judean state”).⁴⁰ For the first meaning, he prefers “Judean” to “Jew” in English. Notably, in Josephus’s story about the conversion of the royal family of Adiabene, where Izates wants to be circumcised to “be steadily a Jew” (εἶναι βεβαίως Ἰουδαῖος), *Ioudaios* has absolutely no ethnic sense and means only “Judaizer.”⁴¹ Both of the first two meanings mentioned by Cohen seem to be relevant to Buzand’s հրեայք. This word is the exact Armenian equivalent of the Hebrew *Yehûdîm*, Greek *Ioudaioi*, and Latin *Judaei*.⁴² In addition to “ethnic Jews” (“Judeans”), it also has the wider meaning “followers of Judaism,” Judeans and non-Judeans, including “sympathizers,” “God-fearers,” and proselytes.

We can cite examples from Armenian literature, starting with the Armenian version of the famous passage in Acts 2:5–11,⁴³ referring to “Jews from every nation” (Ἰουδαῖοι . . . ἀπὸ παντὸς ἔθνους), listed afterward as “Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs.” In the Armenian Bible the Greek text is translated literally: հրեայք . . . յամենայն ազգաց “Jews from

every nation,” which is subsequently explained as հրեայք եւ եկր ինցուն “both Jews and proselytes” (Ἰουδαῖοί τε καὶ προσήλυτοι).

This usage of հրեայք to mean “Jews and proselytes,” together with the oral tradition associating հրեայ with the two meanings, ethnic and cultural/religious, and deriving from *Yehūdî-Ioudaios-Iudaeus*, would have easily entered writings composed in Armenian. A typical example of a wider, not simply ethnic meaning of the word occurs in the *History of Vardan and the Armenian War* by the fifth-century historian Elišē.⁴⁴ He mentions one of the Persian kings (Shāpūr II or III), who, after uselessly trying to persecute Christians, had to tolerate them as well as adherents of other religions in his kingdom:⁴⁵ “He commanded the magi and chief-magi that no one should molest them in any way, but that they should remain undisturbed in their own doctrines without fear—magus and Zandik⁴⁶ and Jew (հրեայն) and Christian, and whatever other many sects there were throughout the Persian Empire.” Elišē lists religious rather than ethnic groups, so in this passage հրեայ means “a follower of the Jewish religion” in a more general sense and not simply “a representative of the Jewish nation.” This religious meaning of the word is apparent in the following usage of the abstract noun հրեություն (literally, “Jewishness”), a derivative of հրեայ/հրեայ, in the *Teaching of Saint Gregory* (§542), a treatise that survives as part of the *History of Armenia* attributed to the fifth-century author Agat’angelos:⁴⁷ “Paul was unknown to be a vessel of election (Acts 9:15) in the time of his Judaism (հրեություն ժամանակին),” or “In the time of the priesthood of Judaism (ի ժամանակս հրեություն քահանայությունն) . . . the priests took the fire of the sacrifices and cast it into the well” (§544). Finally, as already noted, it is remarkable that the ninth-tenth-century author T’ovma Arcruni, narrating that the Persians deported Armenians and “Jews” զհրեայսն taken captive in Van,⁴⁸ uses the term “Christians” զքրիստոնեայսն instead of “Armenians.” Thus, the “Jews,” according to T’ovma, were a large religious group, like the Christians.

P'awstos explains the presence of հրեայք in Armenian cities by the deportations of Tigran II the Great, king of Armenia, who had taken them prisoner from Palestine. As we shall see, Tigran II deported numerous captives not only from Palestine but also from other countries. Part of those peoples could have been converted to Judaism before Tigran's campaigns, and part of them possibly became "sympathizers," "God-fearers," or proselytes after being settled, together with ethnic Jews, in Armenia.⁴⁹ The Armenian tradition reflected in P'awstos Buzand and other early medieval literary sources, in accordance with the general concept of the "Jews" in the Greco-Roman world, did not clearly distinguish the ethnos from the followers or converts: for the Armenians, all of them were հրեայք.⁵⁰

2.7 How Did the Jews Come to Armenia?

P'awstos Buzand says (4.55), "All this multitude of Jews, who were taken into captivity from the land of Armenia,⁵¹ had been taken in ancient times from the land of Palestine by the great Armenian king Tigran, at the time that he also took and brought to Armenia the high-priest of the Jews, Hiwrakandos. And the great King Tigran brought all these Jews in his own days, and settled them in the Armenian cities."⁵²

This passage talks of two different events as if they were one, Tigran II's exiling of a "multitude of Jews" to Armenia and the captivity of the high priest Hyrcanus (Hiwrakandos).⁵³ From the examination of this passage it becomes evident that P'awstos Buzand confused different events that took place at different times.⁵⁴ He says that the high priest Hyrcanus was captured by Tigran II. However, Hyrcanus was actually taken captive in the year 40 BCE, at a time when not Tigran II but his son Artawazd II was king of Armenia. Tigran II had died in 55 BCE; Artawazd came to the throne in 54 and ruled until 33. Therefore, Hyrcanus could not have

been taken captive by Tigran II, who was already dead. The “multitude of Jews,” however, were transferred to Armenia by Tigran II.⁵⁵

Josephus Flavius, the main source for Hyrcanus’s captivity, narrates the following.⁵⁶ With their troops, Barzapharnes, a Parthian satrap, and the Parthian king’s son Pacorus conquered Syria and invaded Judea, reaching as far as Jerusalem. Lysanias, king of Coele Syria, and Antigonus, the previous high priest and king of Judea, promised Pacorus a thousand talents and five hundred women if he would remove Hyrcanus from power and restore Antigonus to the throne. The Parthians continued their military expedition in Judea, plundering Jerusalem and besieging the coastal towns of Tyre, Sidon, and Ptolemaïs (Acre). The inhabitants of Sidon and Ptolemaïs yielded to the Parthians, but the Tyrians resisted them. Hyrcanus and his companion-in-arms Phasaelus, Herod’s brother, were persuaded to meet the Parthians for negotiations. They left Herod in Jerusalem and went to the maritime town of Ecdippon (Achziv). There they were perfidiously imprisoned and handed over to Antigonus, who bit off Hyrcanus’s ears so that he could never hold the high priesthood again, for, according to Jewish law, a priest must be whole of limb. Phasaelus committed suicide, and Hyrcanus was taken captive to Parthia. Later on, Josephus says, Hyrcanus, after being brought to Parthia, was lodged in Babylon.

Scholars have stated that Josephus’s information about Hyrcanus settling in Babylon contradicts that which is related by P’awstos, namely that Hyrcanus, together with other Jews, was taken as a captive to Armenia.⁵⁷ And since no one has doubted the truthfulness of Josephus’s account, it has naturally been concluded that the Armenian tradition is false. Let us try, however, to resolve this contradiction, using the other important Armenian source for the events in question, the *History of Armenia* by Movsēs Xorenac’i, and also taking into consideration the fact that Josephus does not clearly distinguish Armenia and the Armenians from Parthia and the Parthians.⁵⁸ Furthermore, we should stress once again that,

according to Josephus, Hyrcanus was first taken to Parthia, and only subsequently, when he was brought to King Phraates, who treated him gently, did he receive a dwelling in Babylon. Thus, even if not much importance is attached to the confusion of Parthia and Armenia in Josephus, we may infer that Hyrcanus could well have been in Armenia, at least for a short period of time, on his way to Parthia and Phraates's palace before settling in Babylon, and together with him other Jews could have been brought captive to Armenia.⁵⁹

Movsēs Xorenac'i's report helps to explain both the anachronisms in P'awstos and the contradiction between Josephus and the Armenian tradition about where Hyrcanus was brought by the victorious troops, for he actually refers to two deportations of Jewish population to Armenia. According to Movsēs (2.14), the first deportation took place before Tigran II's conquest of the Phoenician town Ptolemaïs in 70 BCE. "He (i.e., Tigran II) attacked Palestine,"⁶⁰ and, Movsēs writes, "took many captives from among the Jews and besieged the city of Ptolemaïs." Then he narrates (2.16) that those Jews were settled in two Armenian cities: "The king of Armenia, Tigran, after settling the Jewish prisoners in Armawir and in the city of Vardges . . . marched to Syria against the Roman army." Armawir was the ancient capital of Armenia.⁶¹ Thus, in addition to the seven cities mentioned by P'awstos Buzand,⁶² Movsēs Xorenac'i witnesses to Jewish settlers in Armawir, although, as he further reports (2.49), those Jews were later moved by King Eruand the Last⁶³ to his new capital, Eruandašat, and, subsequently, King Artašēs I made his celebrated capital city Artašat their home.⁶⁴ Furthermore, in 2.65 Movsēs reports that "the city of Vardges" was Vałaršapat, which had been fortified by King Vałarš: "Vardges . . . built this town. Here the middle Tigran . . . settled the . . . colony of Jewish captives, and it became a commercial town. Now this Vałarš surrounded it with a wall . . . and called it Vałaršapat." Finally, in 3.35 Movsēs describes the devastation of Armenian cities by Shāpūr's army (ca. 368/9):

Gathering many troops . . . he (Shāpūr) attacked Armenia. They came and invested the castle of Artagerk'. . . [T]he garrison of the fortress . . . surrendered willingly. . . . Taking them captive with the treasures and Queen P'arandzem they brought them to Assyria. And there they massacred them. . . . At the same time there arrived a command from King Shapuh that they should destroy and raze the fortifications of all cities and bring the Jews into captivity including those Jews living by the same Jewish law in Van Tosp whom Barzap'ran R'shtuni had brought there in the days of Tigran. . . . They also took into captivity the Jews in Artašat and Vałaršapat whom the same king Tigran had brought there.⁶⁵

To this last account, much shorter than that in P'awstos, Movsēs adds notable details, not cited here, which will be discussed below.⁶⁶

The second deportation is referred to in Movsēs Xorenac'i 2.19, which passage contains significant information and is quite important for the study of Movsēs's sources and his methods of using them. Here he speaks of the Jews brought by the Armenian commander Barzap'ran R'shtuni to Van. The relevant parts of his narrative generally correspond to one of his main sources for this chapter, that is, Josephus's account of the Parthian incursion into Syria in 40 BCE summarized earlier. However, what Movsēs relates differs from Josephus at a number of points. The chief difference is that he attributes the military campaign not exclusively to the Parthians but to the "Armenian-Persian" ("Persian" here meaning "Parthian") joint army. In addition, Josephus's Parthian satrap Barzapharnes (or Bazaphranes) has become an Armenian named Barzap'ran R'shtuni. Third, "Pacaros" (the Parthian king's son Pacorus in Josephus) acts as mediator between Barzap'ran R'shtuni and Antigonos, Hyrcanus's brother. Antigonos offered a thousand talents of gold and five hundred women as a bribe in exchange for his restoration to the high priesthood and sovereignty.

Some scholars have claimed that Movsēs Xorenac'i simply invented the information that has no parallel in Josephus.⁶⁷ Others

have rightly regarded the participation of Armenians in these events as quite probable, because in this period the Parthians, together with their Armenian allies, conducted prolonged military campaigns in Syria.⁶⁸ But what other work could Movsēs have used as a source for the more detailed information available to him neither in P'awstos's nor in Josephus's works?

Most experts have been mistrustful of Movsēs's reference in *History* 2.10 to his other important literary source (alongside Josephus and Hippolytus of Rome) for this section of his book, namely the *Chronicle* of Sextus Julius Africanus (second to third centuries CE), now surviving only in fragments.⁶⁹ I have already demonstrated elsewhere that there are verbatim parallels between the relevant passages by Africanus⁷⁰ and Movsēs.⁷¹ Those parallels corroborate Movsēs's use of at least fragments of the *Chronicle*. It is well-known that a large part of Africanus's book covered the same period and related the same events as Josephus's works, so in certain cases in which Movsēs differs from Josephus, he may have drawn information from Africanus. Authors such as Eusebius of Caesarea and George Syncellus used Josephus and Africanus in parallel with one another. Possibly, Movsēs knew about the participation of Armenians in the conquest of Syria in 40 BCE from Africanus's *Chronicle*. Given the fact that the two allied countries, Parthia and Armenia, were in a close relationship in this period (so close that Josephus confused them), the commander Barzapharnes (Barzaphranes, Barzap'ran—Βαρζαφράνης / Βαρζαφράνης) might have been an Armenian and might have brought Jewish captives to Armenia. "Tigran ordered Barzap'ran," Movsēs writes, "to settle the captive Jews from Marisa in the city of Semiramis" (2.19).⁷²

To summarize: P'awstos Buzand refers to one captivity of Jews by King Tigran II in 70 BCE, at which time, he says, the high priest Hyrcanus was also brought to Armenia. According to P'awstos, those Jews were settled in the seven Armenian cities, Artašat,

Vaġaršapat, Eruandašat, Zarehawan, Zarišat, Van, and Naxčawan, which were subsequently ruined by the Persians circa 368/9 CE. Movsēs Xorenac'i helps to solve the anachronism in P'awstos, who writes as if Hyrcanus were deported with the other Jews by Tigran II in 70 BCE. In fact, Hyrcanus was exiled in 40 BCE and so could not have been deported by Tigran II in the year 70. Movsēs reports two deportations of Jewish population from Palestine, the first immediately before the fatal conflict of Tigran II with the Roman army in 69 BCE, and the second at the time of the Parthian-Armenian invasion into Syria and Palestine in 40 BCE. Of the seven cities with Jewish population mentioned in P'awstos, Movsēs speaks of four: Artašat, Vaġaršapat, Eruandašat, and Van. He also adds another famous Armenian city to the list, Armawir, stating that the Jewish settlers were later moved thence, first to Eruandašat and then to Artašat. Armawir, together with Vaġaršapat, Movsēs says, became the home of the Jews of the 70 BCE deportation, while the captives of the year 40 BCE were all settled in Van.

For more clarity, those data in Movsēs Xorenac'i are presented in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 The Settlement of Jews in Armenian Cities according to Movsēs Xorenac'i

Jews deported by Tigran II in 70 BCE settled in:	Jews deported by Barzap'ran in 40 BCE settled in:
Armawir → Eruandašat → Artašat Vaġaršapat	Van

P'awstos combined two different events, placing both in the year of Hyrcanus's exile (40 BCE) and erroneously thinking that the high priest was brought to Armenia by Tigran II. Movsēs also mistakenly thought that Barzap'ran was acting on Tigran II's orders, while in reality Artawazd II was king of Armenia in 40 BCE. Movsēs, clearly and correctly, knows that there was a first

deportation at the time Tigran invaded Phoenicia (70 BCE). That this invasion really took place is corroborated by Josephus. It is unlikely that Movsēs simply invented this information—there was no reason for such an invention. Josephus speaks of Tigran II's siege of Ptolemaïs, keeping silent about any expulsion of Jews. Movsēs has drawn some of his data from Julius Africanus's *Chronicle* (probably from fragments of it) as well as from Josephus's *War*. Indeed, since Africanus's *Chronicle* may well have been the source of Movsēs's knowledge of the first deportation, we can conclude that during his military campaigns Tigran II took substantial numbers of Jews captive and brought them to Armenia.

The settlement of Armenian cities by way of *synoikismos*,⁷³ that is, the practice of shifting multitudes of peoples from the conquered countries, was typical of Tigran II's policy. Information about this practice is also contained in Greco-Roman sources, including Strabo (64/63 BCE–ca. 23 CE), Plutarch (46–119 CE), Appian (second century CE), Cassius Dio (ca. 150–235 CE), and Justin (third century CE) citing Pompey Trogus (first century BCE–first century CE). According to these authors, on various dates the inhabitants of at least twelve Hellenistic cities of Cilicia, Cappadocia, Mesopotamia, and other countries were brought to Armenia. Some of those peoples were probably assimilated by the Armenians, and others, especially Greeks, returned to their countries. Most of the Jews, as is evident from the Armenian sources, stayed in Armenia and lived as a separate community.⁷⁴ The policy of *synoikismos* was very likely continued by Tigran II's son and successor, Artawazd II. His armed forces accompanied the Parthians on their incursion into Syria and Judea, brought more Jews to Armenia and settled them in Van. Subsequently, since in Armenian tradition Tigran II the Great's fame overshadowed all his successors, the military campaign and *synoikismos* of the year 40 BCE, in Artawazd II's days, were also attributed to him.⁷⁵

2.8 Greco-Roman Sources on Tigran's Deportations

Further corroboration of mass deportations of various peoples, most probably including Jews, in the time of Tigran II is to be found in Greco-Roman sources. P'awstos Buzand and Movsēs Xorenac'i speak only of Jews exiled from Palestine, before the siege of Ptolemaïs (70 BCE) and in 40 BCE. However, in 93 BCE, long before the year 70, Tigran II had already initiated his policy of bringing masses of captive foreigners and settling them in Armenia. He continued this practice throughout his conquests, from 93 down to 69 BCE, the first year of his disastrous conflict with Rome. Those deportees very likely included Jews as well, though that is not mentioned explicitly in Greco-Roman sources. Before discussing the relevant passages in Strabo, Plutarch, Appian, Cassius Dio, and Justin, we should note that, unlike the Armenian sources, these authors (as well as Josephus Flavius in reporting the conquest of the Phoenician city Ptolemaïs) generally do not list Palestine among the countries under Tigran's control.⁷⁶ However, Plutarch,⁷⁷ in Lucullus's address to the Roman soldiers (*Lucullus* 14.6), mentions Tigran II as a powerful enemy who reigns over Syria and Palestine (Συρίας κρατεῖ καὶ Παλαιστίνης).⁷⁸ Appian in the *Syrian War* (8.48–49) says that “Tigranes conquered all of the Syrian peoples this side of the Euphrates as far as Egypt.”⁷⁹ Thus, Tigran might have held sway, at least for some period of time, over a part of Palestine as well, and captives could have been brought to Armenia from there too. As to the *synoikismos* of the year 40 BCE, the Parthian-Armenian troops at that time reached as far south as Jerusalem.

At the beginning of Tigran II's reign and after he had attached Sophene to Armenia Major, he invaded Cappadocia (in 93 BCE). Subsequently, this region was overrun by him repeatedly. Mithridates Eupator (reigned 120–63 BCE), king of Pontus, was Tigran's ally.⁸⁰ Pompey Trogus's testimony about this alliance

is preserved in Justin's epitome (38.3).⁸¹ The two allies had agreed that the conquered towns and lands would be under Mithridates's dominion while the people and any movable property would belong to Tigran.⁸² This is partly corroborated by Movsēs Xorenac'i (2.14), who says that at the beginning of his reign, Tigran, after his first military campaign, "entrusted the Cappadocian capital Mazhak⁸³ . . . to . . . Mithridates . . . and leaving a numerous army with him . . . returned to our country."⁸⁴ The evidence in Strabo's *Geography* about another conquest of Cappadocia⁸⁵ and deportation of the Mazaceni is well-known: "Mazaca is distant from Pontus about eight hundred stadia to the south. . . . Tigranes, the Armenian, put the people in bad plight when he overran Cappadocia, for he forced them, one and all, to migrate into Mesopotamia; and it was mostly with these that he settled Tigranocerta" (12.2.9).⁸⁶ Appian in the *Mithridatic Wars* (10.67) indicates the huge, even if exaggerated, number of the Cappadocian captives taken to Armenia in consequence of this military operation: "Tigranes . . . the Armenian king threw, as it were, a drag net around Cappadocia and made a haul of about 300,000 people,⁸⁷ whom he carried off to his own country and settled . . . in . . . Tigranocerta."

Tigran II's other conquests, between 89 and 85 BCE, after the Parthians had acknowledged his supremacy, included Atropatene, Gordyene, Adiabene, Mygdonia,⁸⁸ Osroene, and the rest of Mesopotamia. In 84/83 BCE Tigran ascended the throne of the Seleucids in Antioch, becoming the sovereign of Upper Syria and afterward of Cilicia Pedias⁸⁹ and Commagene. Following those conquests, Tigran II from time to time invaded Phoenicia up to 70 BCE, in which year he took Ptolemais.⁹⁰ The Iberians (Georgians) and Caucasian Albanians were also governed by Tigran.⁹¹

For those campaigns of the King of Kings, often resulting in mass expulsions of the inhabitants of the defeated countries, the following information in Strabo (11.14.15) is noteworthy:

The Sophenian Artanes, who held the southern parts and those that lay more to the west than these, was a descendant of

Zariadris. But he was overcome by Tigranes, who established himself as lord of all. The changes of fortune experienced by Tigranes were varied, for at first he was a hostage among the Parthians; and then through them he obtained the privilege of returning home, they receiving as reward therefor seventy valleys in Armenia; but when he had grown in power, he not only took these places back but also devastated their country, both that about Ninus⁹² and that about Arbela;⁹³ and he subjugated to himself the rulers of Atropatene and Gordyaea, and along with these the rest of Mesopotamia, and also crossed the Euphrates and by main strength took Syria itself and Phoenicia; and, exalted to this height, he also founded a city near Iberia, between this place and Zeugma on the Euphrates; and, having gathered peoples thither from twelve Greek cities which he had laid waste, he named it Tigranocerta.

Strabo does not specify those twelve “Greek” (that is to say, “Hellenistic” πόλεων Ἑλληνίδων) cities,⁹⁴ but they supposedly were in at least some of the countries mentioned in the cited passage, that is, Sophene, Assyria, Adiabene, Atropatene, Gordyene, “the rest of Mesopotamia” (τὴν λοιπὴν Μεσοποταμίαν), Syria, and Phoenicia.

Strabo’s information is supplemented by others. Plutarch, when describing the siege of Tigranocerta (Tigranakert) in 69 BCE by Lucullus’s army, says that “there were in the city many Greeks who had been transplanted, like others, from Cilicia, and many barbarians who had suffered the same fate as the Greeks—Adiabeni, Assyrians, Gordyeni, and Cappadocians, whose native cities Tigranes had demolished, and brought their inhabitants to dwell there under compulsion” (*Lucullus* 26.1–2). Then Plutarch writes that the Greek dwellers of Tigranocerta handed it over to the Romans and were sent back to their native cities, together with others (“barbarians”) by Lucullus (29.2–4). Appian informs us that Tigran forcefully settled Armenians, too, in Tigranocerta: the “best” (τοὺς ἀρίστους) of them (12.84). He probably means the

Armenian aristocrats. Furthermore, Appian, like Plutarch, testifies to the capture of the city by treason: the Greek mercenaries inside “seized some of the towers, called to the Romans outside, and admitted them when they came. In this way was Tigranocerta taken, and the immense wealth, appertaining to a newly built and nobly peopled city, plundered” (12.86). Likewise, Cassius Dio (36.2.3–4) says that Lucullus “did seize Tigranocerta when the foreigners living in the city revolted against the Armenians; for the most of them were Cilicians who had once been carried off from their own land, and these let in the Romans during the night.”

Summing up: the countries mentioned by name in Greco-Roman sources, whence multitudes of captives were banished and settled in Armenian cities, are Cappadocia, Cilicia, Adiabene, Assyria, and Gordyene. This does not mean that there were no additional *synoikoi* moved to Armenia from other countries possessed by Tigran. According to his custom, he surely also brought peoples to his urban foundations from elsewhere (e.g., from Upper Syria, where he ruled following the Seleucids for about fourteen years). No one knows where exactly were most of Strabo’s twelve cities, whose dwellers became Tigranocertians. One of them was probably Mazaca, mentioned by Strabo himself, and another one was perhaps the Cilician Soli, which, as Plutarch and Cassius Dio witness, was ruined by the Armenian king.

The Greco-Roman sources mostly refer to foreign *synoikoi* only in Tigranocerta,⁹⁵ but it is difficult to imagine that an ancient city, even such a great and marvelous one as Tigran’s new capital,⁹⁶ could host all those masses of foreigners (supposedly 300,000 from Cappadocia alone, captured during one campaign!) together with the Armenian elite, and that those twelve cities, with all their inhabitants, could fit into one! We should assume that from the beginning some of the captives took up residence at other places (among which were, probably, the seven cities with foreign inhabitants mentioned by P’awstos). On the other hand, it is possible that Tigran II did not completely empty the cities when he

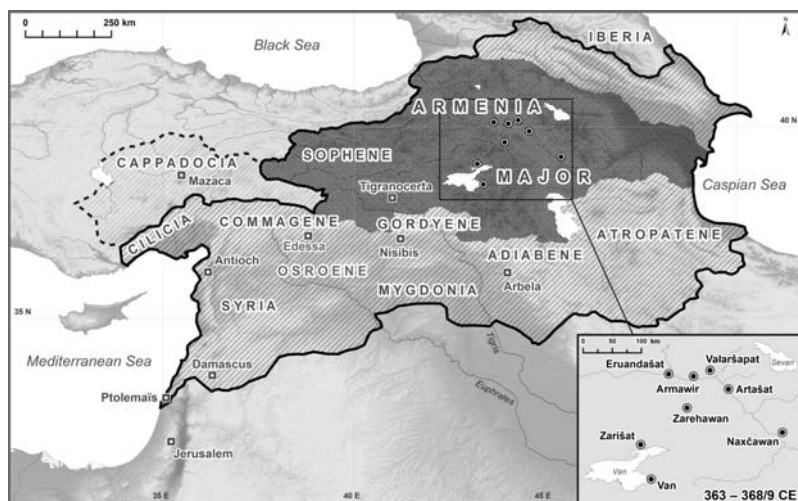
exiled their inhabitants. In two instances, one in Strabo and the other in Plutarch, much larger geographic entities than simply Tigranocerta figure. Strabo, in the passage about the Mazaceni (12.2.9), before mentioning Tigran II's new capital, states that he "forced them, one and all, to migrate into Mesopotamia" (ἅπαντας . . . ἀναστάτους ἐποίησεν εἰς τὴν Μεσοποταμίαν), and Plutarch, in Lucullus's address to the Roman soldiers (14.6), witnesses that Tigran II had moved Hellenistic urban communities to Media (πόλεις Ἑλληνίδας εἰς Μηδίαν ἀνακομίζει). Finally, we should note that this Tigranocerta, the capital, was founded in the late 80s BCE,⁹⁷ whereas Tigran II's deportations had begun from the first years of his reign in the mid-90s. Thus, he must have settled his earliest deportees elsewhere.

The sources say that after the fall of Tigranocerta, the foreigners, especially the Greeks, returned to their native countries, but doubtless there were many others who stayed and made their home elsewhere in Armenia. In this respect, Strabo's words about the Mazaceni, ὕστερον δ' ἐπανήλθον οἱ δυνάμενοι ("later on those who were able returned") in the same passage (12.2.9) are important; they indicate that only those captives who were able to do so returned to their homelands. Also, it should be noted that Tigranocerta survived this Roman attack and continued to exist as an important city, though not as the capital of Armenia, until at least the mid-fourth century CE. According to P'awstos Buzand (4.24), the troops of Shāpūr II, before demolishing Artašat, Vałaršapat, Eruandašat, Zarehawan, Zarišat, Van, and Naxčawan, "took and destroyed the great city Tigranakert," where "they immediately took forty thousand families captive."⁹⁸ This time, P'awstos does not specify the nationality of those families: among them there could well have been Jews who had returned to Tigranocerta after its recovery from the disaster of 69 BCE.

We should also observe some contradictions between the Greco-Roman sources. Strabo regards the Mazaceni (300,000, according to Appian), all of whom (ἅπαντας) had been deported, as

the main settlers of Tigranocerta, saying that Tigran II “mostly” (τὸ πλεόν) settled the city with them. But in the other passage quoted earlier, Strabo, somewhat contradicting himself, reports that Tigran had gathered the inhabitants of twelve Hellenistic cities in Tigranocerta. Cassius Dio, unlike Strabo, informs us that most settlers of Tigranocerta were Cilicians (not Mazaceni): Κίλικές τε γὰρ οἱ πλείους αὐτῶν ἦσαν. Plutarch, as if summing up all available data, states that there were both Greeks and “barbarians” in the city; many Greeks were among the Cilician migrants (ἦσαν . . . πολλοὶ μὲν Ἕλληνες τῶν ἀναστάτων ἐκ Κιλικίας), which means that there also were “barbarians” from Cilicia. The other “barbarians” were Ἀδιαβηνοὶ καὶ Ἀσσύριοι καὶ Γορδυηνοὶ καὶ Καππάδοκες (Adiabeniens, Assyrians, Gordyeneans, and Cappadocians).

We can conclude from these slightly confusing data that for about twenty-five years (ca. 95–70 BCE) Tigran II conquered various countries and transplanted their populations to Armenia,



Map 1 Tigran II's Empire before the Roman-Armenian Wars (69–66 BCE) and the Armenian Cities with Jewish Inhabitants in 363–368/9 CE.

as well as to Mesopotamia and Media. Many of the migrants lived in the new capital, Tigranocerta, while others probably established residence elsewhere in Armenia. Most likely, those Tigranocertians who, after the capital's destruction, were not able to return to their homelands also moved to other Armenian cities. Our next step will be an attempt to determine from which countries, in addition to Palestine specified in the Armenian sources, Jews could have been brought to settle in Armenia.

2.9 The Countries from Which Tigran Could Have Expatriated Jews

There is an interesting quotation in Josephus (*AJ* 14.115) from a lost work by Strabo: "This people (Jews) has already made its way into every city, and it is not easy to find any place in the habitable world which has not received this nation and in which it has not made its power felt."⁹⁹ The authenticity of Josephus's citation can hardly be doubted. If Strabo, the well-informed geographer and one of the most reliable authors of the ancient world, really wrote this, even if he spoke somewhat hyperbolically, nonetheless we may conclude that Tigran in fact could have deported Jews to Armenia from more or less anywhere.¹⁰⁰ Josephus himself in *AJ* 11.132–133, speaking of the growth of the Jewish population in Babylonia and the neighboring countries following the Babylonian exile, witnesses that of the twelve Jewish tribes, only two lived "in Asia and Europe subject to the Romans," and that up to his own days, the other ten lived beyond (πέραν, i.e., east of) the Euphrates River¹⁰¹ and formed "countless myriads whose number cannot be ascertained."¹⁰² The core of Tigran's huge kingdom was northeast of the Euphrates, but as we saw, before the war with Lucullus in 69 BCE he had also attached to it vast territories west of the Euphrates as far as Phoenicia and up to Palestine. Thus, Jews could have been shifted to Armenia from both sides of the famous river, which was

an important boundary for classical authors.¹⁰³ More specifically, we can point to several countries possessed by the Armenian king where, to judge from the surviving sources, considerable numbers of ethnic Jews and Jewish converts lived at the time of his conquests.

The first in our list will be Adiabene, a petty kingdom neighboring Armenia Major on the latter's southern border and the territory of the former Assyria. Its capital, Arbela, yielded to Tigran II between the years 89 and 85 BCE (see p. 39). Josephus's story about the conversion of the Adiabenian royal family to Judaism (*AJ* 20.17ff.) is well-known and corroborated by the Talmud.¹⁰⁴ Izates, son of King Monobazus of Adiabene and his sister Helene, was brought up at the court of Abennerig, king of Charax-Spasinou (in southern Mesopotamia), where a Jewish merchant named Ananias, after having converted Abennerig's wives, also persuaded Izates to worship God according to the Jewish customs. In the meantime, Queen Helene in Adiabene was won over to the Jewish religion by another Jew. Gaining the kingdom following his father's death, Izates decided, after some hesitation (because Ananias warned him that he might incur the opposition of his subjects), to be circumcised in order to become "firmly" a Jew (εἶναι βεβαίως Ἰουδαῖος). He was urged to do so by the third Jew figuring in this story, Eleazar. Izates's elder brother Monobazus, who later became his successor, and their kinsmen followed the king's example.

The conversion of the royal family of Adiabene took place in the first half of the first century CE, that is, about a century after Tigran II's death. However, scholars state that a strong Jewish community existed in Adiabene long before Izates, Helene, Monobazus, and their kin were proselytized.¹⁰⁵ Since the Babylonian exile, the Jewish population of Babylonia had grown steadily,¹⁰⁶ spreading, in the course of time, toward Upper Mesopotamia as well as to the south.¹⁰⁷ "Even before the conversion," Feldman writes, "the Jewish population of Adiabene was probably not inconsiderable,

especially because it included the newly acquired Nisibis, with its sizable Jewish population.”¹⁰⁸

Mygdonia, with its capital Nisibis, as indicated, was another Mesopotamian country subjected by Tigran II. It remained a part of the Armenian kingdom until the Parthian king Artabanus presented it to Izates (Josephus, *AJ* 20.68). Josephus speaks of the Jewish population of Nisibis in *AJ* 18.311–313 and 18.378–379. He says those Jews had settled in that strong city on the Euphrates to be safe from the attacks of the Babylonians and Seleucids, just as other Jews had settled in another well-defended on the Euphrates, Nehardea, for the same reason.

Among the ancient countries inhabited by Jews as a result of the Babylonian exile, scholars also mention Osroene (especially its capital, Edessa),¹⁰⁹ Gordyene,¹¹⁰ and Iberia.¹¹¹ The Jewish population of Syria was especially numerous. Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 BCE–50 CE) testifies in *Legatio ad Gaium* 33.245¹¹² that there were multitudes of Jews “in every city of Asia and Syria” (Ἰουδαῖοι καθ’ ἐκάστην πόλιν εἰσὶ παμπληθεῖς, Ἀσίας τε καὶ Συρίας). There is also evidence in Josephus’s *BJ* that many Jews resided in Syrian cities. Philo even says that the Roman governor of Syria, Petronius, had become an adherent of Judaism.¹¹³ I mentioned earlier the very interesting passage in which Josephus writes that in Syrian cities there were two hostile camps, Syrians and Jews together with the Judaizers.¹¹⁴ In another passage (*BJ* 7.43–44) he writes, “The Jewish race, densely interspersed among the native populations of every portion of the world, is particularly numerous in Syria, where intermingling is due to the proximity of the two countries.” They especially congregated in Antioch, he adds, because that city was a very large one, and chiefly because King Antiochus’s successors made it possible for them to live there safely.¹¹⁵ Josephus is referring to the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 BCE), whose successors had permitted a great number of Jews to settle in Antioch.¹¹⁶

In 84/83 BCE, Tigran II succeeded the Seleucid dynasty as ruler of Antioch and, in line with his favored policy of synoecism, might well have deported Jews to Armenia from the Seleucid capital, Antioch, or from other cities of Upper Syria. Josephus's next testimony (*BJ* 2.559–561) pertains to Damascus, another famous Syrian city under Tigran II's rule, where his coins have been found.¹¹⁷ Josephus, in his narration of the tragic events before the great revolt of the Jews against the Romans in the late 60s CE, reports that the Syrians of Damascus organized a mass slaughter of the Jewish population of the city but were afraid of betrayal by their own wives, almost all of whom had been won over to the Jewish religion.¹¹⁸

Thus, considerable numbers of Jews lived in several countries that were part of Tigran's vast kingdom. Both P'awstos Buzand and Movsēs Xorenac'i say that the Jews who lived in the cities demolished by the Persians in the fourth century CE had come from Palestine because they knew that the homeland of the Jews was Palestine¹¹⁹ and because the Armenian tradition apparently was aware only of the military campaigns of 70 and 40 BCE. However, in view of the considerations outlined earlier, we may say that Jews could have moved to Armenia at least from Adiabene, Mygdonia, Gordyene, Osroene, Iberia, and Syria as well.

2.10 The Eight Armenian Cities with Armenian-Jewish Populations

Of the eight cities, the most ancient was Van (Tosp-Van),¹²⁰ the capital of the kingdom of Urartu (flourished in the ninth to seventh centuries BCE), located two to three kilometers east of Lake Van (now in eastern Turkey). It was called Tušpa in the Urartian times, and subsequently its name, in the form Tosp, was given to the district; from the late sixth century on it was part of the Vaspurakan region. "Van" is probably derived from Biaina (Biainili), the Urartian name of the kingdom. Claudius Ptolemy (ca. 100–170 CE), in the

description of Armenia Major in his *Geography*,¹²¹ names both Lake Van and the district Θωσπίτις and mentions the city as Θώσπια (5.12.3 and 8). Movsēs Xorenac'i attributes the construction of Van to Semiramis, the legendary queen of Assyria, and provides a beautiful depiction of the site and the city (1.16). In the Achaemenid epoch, Van was the administrative center of the thirteenth satrapy, and it continued, with its local and foreign inhabitants, to flourish in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. P'awstos Buzand reports that when Van was taken by Shāpūr's troops, it belonged to the Ēštuni noble family: "The lady of Ēštunik' [remained] in the citadel of the fortress of Van." Afterward she was cruelly executed (4.59).¹²² Van was a stronghold with an unassailable citadel in its midst, located in the central part of Armenia Major and connected with the rest of the country by a network of routes. The city of Van remained an important urban center throughout the history of Armenia, and today it survives as a minor town mainly inhabited by Kurds; much of Van, however, is now ruins.

The history of Armawir, too, goes back to Urartu.¹²³ It was probably built some time after the fall of that kingdom on the remains of the Urartian town Argištihinili¹²⁴ founded by King Argišti I (reigned ca. 780–756 BCE). Armawir was one of the two cities where, according to Movsēs Xorenac'i, Tigran settled the Jews taken captive before the siege of Ptolemaïs (70 BCE). He attributes its foundation to the legendary hero Aramayis (hence the city's name) (1.12). Ptolemy mentions Armawir (Ἀρμαουίρα) alongside Artasat (5.12.5), and, in fact, they were not far from each other. The archaeological site, as Gevorg Tirac'yan states, is located around a volcanic height, "sur la rive gauche de l'Araxe, à l'ouest de la vallée l'Ayrarat."¹²⁵ In the late fourth through late third centuries BCE, Armawir was the royal capital of the Eruandid (Orontid) dynasty,¹²⁶ which was succeeded by the Artasēsids in the early second century BCE. The last representative of the Eruandids, called Eruand (Orontes), is mentioned by Strabo (11.14.15): "The last was Orontes, the descendant of Hydarnes,¹²⁷ one of the seven Persians."

He reigned in the late third through early second centuries BCE and, as Movsēs Xorenac'i witnesses (2.39 and 49),¹²⁸ transferred the royal residence, together with the Jewish captives, from Armawir to his newly founded capital, Eruandašat. On the basis of the Greek inscriptions found in Armawir in 1911 and 1927, Manandian came to the conclusion that Greek colonists, together with Armenians, lived in the city in the early Hellenistic period and that there was a temple of Apollo and Artemis in Armawir, where Greek priests served.¹²⁹ Thus, the city of Armawir was accustomed to foreign inhabitants long before Tigran settled the Jews there. Following the transfer of the capital by the last Eruand, Armawir gradually lost its significance, though it existed as a city until the fifth century CE.

Naxčawan (Naxiĵewan)¹³⁰ was an ancient city, but there is no clear evidence in the sources about the time of its foundation. Its name, meaning "first dwelling," is connected with the myth that after the Flood Noah landed there and founded the city.¹³¹ If we believe Movsēs Xorenac'i (1.30), a great number of captive Medes were settled there as early as the sixth century BCE. Naxčawan was a commercial center situated on the trade route from Ecbatana to Artašat; it was slightly north of the Araxes (Arax) River, south-east of Artašat. In Ptolemy's *Geography* it is named Ναξουάνα and mentioned alongside Armawir and Artašat (5.12.5). In the Middle Ages, it was included in the Vaspurakan and at other times in the Siwnik' region of Armenia. P'awstos Buzand (4.55) says that the Persians "ruined it" (զնա քանդեցին) but does not add, unlike in the case of the other cities, that it was "demolished to its foundations." Perhaps Naxčawan was significantly damaged but not completely destroyed. Existing as a village until the seventh century, it regained its city status in the period of Arab rule. Subsequently, Naxčawan was ruined or plundered several times (by the Seljuks, the Mongols, and others); nevertheless it still survives as the main town of the Naxiĵewan region.

Eruandašat,¹³² another ancient Armenian metropolis, as already noted, was built in the late third or early second centuries BCE

by King Eruand the Last. “Eruandašat” is explained as “Eruand + *šād*,” the latter meaning “joy” in Middle Persian (“Eruand’s joy”). Eruand transferred the royal court from Armawir to Eruandašat, but shortly after that, this new royal residence had to cede its status to Artašat.¹³³ Strabo’s reference to the last Eruand was cited earlier.¹³⁴ His name also figures in the Greek inscription discovered in Armawir in 1927.¹³⁵ Manandian supposes that the official language of the Eruandid elite was Greek.¹³⁶ Eruandašat was probably an international city of the Hellenistic type like Armawir. It was situated in the Aršaruni district of the Ayrarat region, west of Armawir and not far from it.

Movsēs Xorenac’i is the best source for information about Eruandašat. He narrates the change of the capital as follows (2.39): “In his (Eruand’s) days the court was transferred from the hill called Armawir, for the River Araxes had shifted to a distance, and in the long winter and when the stream froze over from the bitter north winds there was no longer sufficient water for the capital. Inconvenienced by this and also seeking a stronger site, Eruand moved the court westward to a rocky hill around which flowed on one side the Araxes and on the other the Akhurean.” Eruandašat was still prosperous in the mid-fourth century CE, but its destruction by the Persians in 368/9 turned out to be final. It existed as a village until its complete disappearance in the Middle Ages. The last traces of human activity found there are from the thirteenth century. Recently, archaeological research has begun at the supposed site of the city.

Artašat¹³⁷ was the most renowned Armenian city in the Hellenistic world. Founded by King Artašēs (Ἀρταξίας) I (reigned 189–160 BCE), it replaced the former capitals Armawir and Eruandašat. The name Artašat (Ἀρταξάτα) means “Artaši + *šād*” (“Artašēs’s joy”). Judging from the data available in literary sources, as well as from the archaeological finds, it was a typical Hellenistic city with a multinational population. Pliny the Elder (ca. 23–79 CE) in his *Natural History* (6.10.27)¹³⁸ locates the city “on a plain

adjoining the Araxes” (*in campis iuxta Araxen*). Movsēs Xorenac’i writes that it was built at “the place where the Araxes and Metsamawr join” (2.49), but since the latter river’s course has changed, the location of Artašat remained unclear until about 1970, when archaeological excavations began in the Ararat region, not far from the Xorvirap church in the district formerly called Ostan (“Big City”) In recent decades, those excavations have been renewed.¹³⁹ Strabo (11.14.6) states that Artašat “was founded by Hannibal for Artaxias the king.” Plutarch (*Lucullus* 31.4) gives more details: Hannibal found refuge in Artašēs’s palace.¹⁴⁰ Seeing an appropriate and fitting place for a new city, he made a preliminary plan and persuaded the Armenian king to start the construction work. Artašēs gladly agreed and asked Hannibal to supervise the builders. Thus “a great and very beautiful city” (μέγα τι καὶ πάγκαλον χρῆμα πόλεως) was constructed, to which Artašēs gave his own name and made it the capital of Armenia. We know from Tacitus (56–ca. 120 CE), *Annales*, 13.41 and Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 62.20.1, that in 58 CE Artašat was taken and subsequently burned and demolished by the legions of the Roman commander Domitius Corbulo (died 67 CE). When in 66 CE Trdat (Tiridates) I, brother of the Parthian king Vologeses I,¹⁴¹ received the crown of Armenia from Nero’s hands, the emperor also gave him permission, money, and workers to rebuild Artašat, and for a short time the reconstructed city was called Νερώνεια in honor of Nero (Cassius Dio, 63.1.2–7, 63.2). Situated on a significant trade route to the ports of the Black Sea, Artašat was of commercial importance. With some interruptions, it probably remained the main metropolis of Armenia until about the second half of the fifth century, when Dvin became the capital of the country. Movsēs Xorenac’i writes (3.8) that the inhabitants of the city gladly moved to Dvin because at that time the climate around Artašat was unhealthy. After that, Artašēs’s city is no longer mentioned as an urban center.

There are but few data in the sources about the cities Zarehawan¹⁴² and Zarišat.¹⁴³ Like Artašat, both were apparently

built in the time of Artasēs I and possibly bore the name of his father, Zareh (Ζαρέαδρις):¹⁴⁴ “Zareh + *awan*” (*awan* meaning “settlement” or “town” in Armenian), “Zareh’s town,” and “Zareh + *šād*,” “Zareh’s joy.” In Manandian’s opinion, Zarehawan was situated in the Bagrewand district, south of Eruandašat and northeast of Lake Van, close to the main trade route of Armenia passing by Tigranakert and Artasat. Zarišat was situated southeast of Zarehawan, not far from the northeastern shore of Lake Van. Apparently, both were Hellenistic cities with mixed population. The numbers of the inhabitants taken captive (see Table 2.1) suggest that Zarehawan was smaller than Zarišat. This is corroborated by the fact that P’awstos Buzand (4.55) calls Zarišat a “great city” (զբաղաբն մեծ), while he mentions Zarehawan as simply a “city” (զբաղաբն). Movsēs Xorenac’i speaks of “the royal city of Zarišat” (յարքունական քաղաքին Զարիշատի) in the days of King Aršak II (3.23), which means that in the mid-fourth century Zarišat belonged to the Armenian Arsacids. Destroyed by the Persians, both cities subsequently declined to the status of villages.

Vaḫaršapat,¹⁴⁵ as the name itself suggests (“Vaḫarš + *âbâd*,” the latter meaning “settled” in Pahlavi: “settled by Vaḫarš”), was founded by King Vaḫarš (Vologeses) I of Armenia, who reigned 117–140 CE. According to Movsēs Xorenac’i (2.16 and 2.65), Vaḫaršapat previously was a town called Ասանն Վարդգեսի (Vardgēs’s Town). It had been built in the days of the first Eruand (i.e., in the sixth century BCE). Vaḫarš “surrounded it with walls,” and it was in Vaḫaršapat that the “first colony of Jewish captives” was settled. As a result of this synoecism, “it became a commercial town” (2.65). In 163 CE, the Romans declared Vaḫaršapat the capital of Armenia and renamed it Καινὴ πόλις (“New City,” նոր քաղաք in Armenian sources). Though Vaḫaršapat’s status of capital did not prove permanent, this city continued to exist. It survived the destruction by the Persians in the fourth century and was one of the most important Armenian cities until the Arab invasion in the mid-seventh century. In the fourth to fifth centuries CE, Vaḫaršapat

was the religious and cultural center of the country. Agat'angelos refers to it as "the residence of the Armenian kings" in the province of Ayrarat (§122). His remarks concern the time of Trdat III the Great (293–ca. 330), during whose reign, in the early fourth century, Christianity became the official state religion of Armenia. Vałaršapat is also closely associated with another crucial event in the history of Armenia, the invention of the Armenian script in the early fifth century CE. During the Arab rule in the mid-seventh to ninth centuries, the city lost its significance, existing as an abandoned, partly ruined village, to be once again revived by the Bagratid kings in the ninth century. Other disastrous periods in the city's life were the Seljuk (from the mid-eleventh century) and Mongol (from the first quarter of the thirteenth century) conquests. However, Vałaršapat was restored to its former status of the religious center of Armenia in 1441, when the Patriarchal See was transferred there from Sis in Cilicia. Since then, Vałaršapat, more commonly called Ėjmiacin ("The Only Begotten descended"),¹⁴⁶ is the residence of the Catholicos of All Armenians and the center of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Situated about twenty kilometers west of Erevan, today it is a pleasant town with many sacred places and historical monuments.

As is clear from the foregoing, for some of the cities in question, the Persian invasion of 368/9 was the end. Others (especially Van, Vałaršapat, and Naxčawan) were rebuilt and rehabilitated, so that they figured as important urban centers in later times and indeed survive as towns to the present day.

2.11 Herod the Great's Descendants on the Throne of Armenia

Following the death of Tigran IV, the last Artashesid king of Armenia, in his battle against "barbarians" in 1 CE and the abdication of his sister and wife, Queen Erato,¹⁴⁷ Rome and Parthia

competed with one another for their protégés to govern the country. This situation lasted until the year 66, when Trdat I received the kingdom and the Parthian Arsacids were firmly established on the throne of Armenia. Before that, two kings of Herodian descent are reported to have ruled in Armenia Major for short periods of time, and a third king of Herodian lineage is reported to have been appointed king of Armenia Minor, where his reign was probably quite long. The two kings of Armenia Major bore the dynastic names Tigran V and Tigran VI, and the king of Armenia Minor was called Aristobulus.

The main sources for Tigran V are the bilingual Latin-Greek *Monumentum Ancyranum*, also known as *Res gestae divi Augusti* (37),¹⁴⁸ Josephus Flavius (*AJ* 18.139; *BJ* 1.552, 2.222), and Cornelius Tacitus (*Annales* 6.40).¹⁴⁹ In the *Monumentum Ancyranum*, Augustus Caesar (emperor from 31 BCE to 14 CE) mentions the installation of the Mede Ariobarzanes as king of Armenia among his noteworthy deeds. After Ariobarzanes's death, Augustus gave the kingdom to Ariobarzanes's son Artavazdes. When the latter was killed, he sent Tigranes, "who was descended from the royal family of the Armenians" (*qui erat ex regio genere Armeniorum oriundus*, ὃς ἦν ἐκ γένους Ἀρμενίου βασιλικοῦ) to that kingdom. Ariobarzanes was a member of the royal family of Atropatene. He reigned for about two years (2–4 CE) and, as Tacitus relates (*Annales* 2.4), died accidentally. His son Artavazdes (known as Artawazd IV) was also king for about two years (4–6 CE). He was killed, probably by Armenians, and Tigran V became king (6 CE).¹⁵⁰ His rule was even shorter than his predecessors', less than one year;¹⁵¹ and then he was dethroned. The reign of the two Medes and Tigran V was apparently not welcomed by the Armenian elite. Augustus Caesar notes that Tigran V was of the Armenian royal family, but from Josephus's information it is clear that Tigran V could have been an Artashesid (Artaxiad) only on his mother's side. "Alexander, King Herod's son," Josephus writes in *AJ* 18.139–140, "who had been put to death by his father, had two sons, Alexander and Tigranes, by

the daughter of Archelaus,¹⁵² king of Cappadocia. Tigranes, who was king of Armenia, died childless after charges were brought against him at Rome.” Thus, Josephus explicitly says that this Tigran (undoubtedly Tigran V) was Herod the Great’s¹⁵³ grandson and son of Alexander, whose wife was from the Cappadocian royal family (her name was Glaphyra).¹⁵⁴ Manandian hypothesizes that Glaphyra was the daughter of an Armenian Artashesid king.¹⁵⁵ This conjecture seems to be correct, or else Augustus Caesar’s testimony that Tigran was *ex regio genere Armeniorum*, ἐκ γένους Ἀρμενίου βασιλικοῦ would be baseless. However, Glaphyra herself boasted about her pedigree, claiming that “she was descended on her father’s side from Temenus, on her mother’s from Darius, the son of Hystaspes” (Josephus, *BJ* 1.476). Temenus was the mythical ancestor of the Macedonian kings (Herodotus 8.137–138). This means that Glaphyra, if her boast was justified, could have been an Artashesid, like her son Tigran V, only by her mother’s lineage, which she claimed went back to Darius I.

Earlier I cited the evidence in Strabo that the last Eruand was a descendent of Hydarnes, one of the “seven Persians,” Darius I’s allies. In his Aramaic inscriptions, Artashes I calls himself “Eruandian”;¹⁵⁶ that is, he and his descendants traced their genealogy to Achaemenian nobility. (Glaphyra preferred to vaunt Darius I himself as her ancestor!) As to the further fate of Tigran V, Josephus witnesses that he “died childless after charges were brought against him at Rome.” Furthermore, we know from Tacitus (*Annales* 6.40) that the accusation was fatal: “Even Tigranes, who had once ruled Armenia and was now impeached, did not escape the punishment of an ordinary citizen¹⁵⁷ on the strength of his royal title.” He was executed, Tacitus reports, in the consulate of Quintus Plautius and Sextus Papinius (36 CE); thus, Tigran V became one of Tiberius Caesar’s victims. A unique copper coin, attributed to him, is kept at the Bibliothèque nationale de France.¹⁵⁸

Alexander, Tigran V’s father and Herod the Great’s son, had a brother named Aristobulus (their mother was Mariamne, Herod’s

second wife). Fearing a plot, Herod put Alexander and Aristobulus to death (Josephus, *BJ* 1.551). Aristobulus was married to Bernice, daughter of Herod the Great's sister Salome, and they had three sons. One of them, named Herod, was king of the petty kingdom of Chalcis in Syria. Herod's son bore his grandfather's name, Aristobulus, and became king of Armenia Minor (Herod of Chalcis's wife, Aristobulus's mother, was also called Mariamne). Information about Aristobulus, King of Armenia Minor, is found in Josephus and Tacitus.¹⁵⁹ In *BJ* 2.221–222, Josephus speaks of his descent and family, and in *AJ* 20.158 and *BJ* 2.252, he testifies that Nero (emperor from 54 to 68 CE) gave the kingdom of Armenia Minor to Aristobulus. This is confirmed by Tacitus: "Lesser Armenia was entrusted to Aristobulus, Sophene to Sohaemus, each with the ensigns of royalty." This happened in the first year of Nero's rule (Josephus, *AJ* 20.158: πρώτῳ τῆς Νέρωνος ἀρχῆς ἔτει), or more exactly, at the end of that year (Tacitus, *Annales* 13.6: *fine anni*). Tacitus mentions him again when narrating the events of 60 CE (14.26). He was probably still the king of Armenia Minor. In addition, Nero gave him more parts (unspecified) of Armenia, just as he gave parts of it to other kings who were his supporters: those regions, "according to their respective proximities, were put under the subjection of Pharasmanes, Polemo, Aristobulus, and Antiochus." Finally, Aristobulus figures once more as king of Chalcis and ally of Rome in Josephus's narrative (*BJ* 7.226–227) of the Roman general Petus's invasion of Commagene in the fourth year of Vespasian's reign, that is, in 72 CE (Vespasian was emperor from 69 to 79). This may mean that Aristobulus was no longer king of Armenia Minor, which supposedly had become a Roman province earlier in the same year.¹⁶⁰ In short, Aristobulus ascended the throne of Armenia Minor in 54 and presumably governed there until circa 72.

Tigran VI, son of Tigran V's brother Alexander, figures in the last stage (late 50s to mid-60s) of the conflict between Rome and Parthia in the first century CE for dominion over Armenia. It

ended in 66, when Trdat, brother of the Parthian king Vologeses I, was crowned in Rome and became the founder of the Aršakuni (Arsacid) dynasty of Armenia. Tigran VI was Nero's protégé and was strongly opposed by many Armenians, who preferred Trdat, and particularly by the powerful Parthians. Therefore, his reign (60–61 CE), like that of Tigran V, was short. Especially irritating to the Armenian pro-Parthian party and the Parthians themselves was his cruel and devastating attack in the spring of 61 on Adiabene, Armenia's immediate neighbor and part of Vologeses I's kingdom. Shortly after that, he had to flee from the Parthian army and defend himself behind the walls of Tigranakert. Although the troops besieging Tigranakert could not take it, on Vologeses's demand Tigran VI was soon removed from the throne by the Romans.

References to Tigran VI occur in Josephus (*AJ* 18.139) and Cassius Dio (62.20.2–4), and considerable information about him is provided by Tacitus in the *Annales* (14.26, 15.1–6, 17).¹⁶¹ Tacitus describes Tigran's character quite negatively. Josephus, too, does not sympathize with him for a clear reason: Tigran was not an adherent of Judaism. "Alexander had a son who had the same name as his brother Tigranes," Josephus writes, "and who was sent forth by Nero to be king of Armenia." He adds that this younger Alexander also had a son called Alexander, and that the descendants of the elder Alexander—Tigran V, his brother Alexander, and the latter's son Alexander—were Hellenized Jews: they "abandoned from birth the observance of the ways of the Jewish land and ranged themselves with the Greek tradition." Cassius Dio briefly relates the invasion of Adiabene by Tigran VI, the subsequent siege of Tigranakert by Vologeses's generals, and, as a result of these events, the Parthian-Roman negotiations. Tacitus, narrating the same events in more detail, states that Armenia once again remained without a "master" (*arbiter*) because Tigran VI had to leave Armenia after his short and restless reign.

Summing up, let us attempt to diagram the genealogy of the Herodian kings of the two Armenias (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3 The Genealogy of the Herodian Kings

Herod the Great (37–4 BCE) and his second wife, Mariamne		
↓ Alexander, married to Glaphyra (presumably, Armenian on her mother's side), daughter of Archelaus, king of Cappadocia (36 BCE–17 CE)		↓ Aristobulus, married to Bernice, daughter of Herod the Great's sister Salome
↓ Tigran V, king of Armenia Major in 6 CE, executed in Rome in 36	↓ Alexander ↓ Tigran VI, king of Armenia Major in 60–61 CE	↓ Herod ↓ Aristobulus, king of Armenia Minor in 54–ca. 72 CE

2.12 Information on the Jewish Origin
of Armenian Princely Families
in Movsēs Xorenac'i

There is intriguing information in the *History of Armenia* by Movsēs Xorenac'i about the Jewish origin of one of the leading princely families of Armenia, the Bagratids (Bagratunis). The story goes back to the distant past when King Nebuchadnezzar II (reigned ca. 605–ca. 561 BCE) took Jerusalem and deported Jews to Babylonia. In chapter 1.22, based, as Movsēs says, on Mar Abas Catina,¹⁶² he tells the following events. King Hrač'ēay of Armenia is permitted by Nebuchadnezzar to settle one of the captive Jewish leaders, called Šambat (= Hebrew Šabbat or Syrian “Šabbəṯā”), in Armenia. Hrač'ēay greatly honors him, and from this Šambat, Movsēs says, “the Bagratuni family descends, and that is certain.” Furthermore, Movsēs refutes the Armenian origin (from Hayk, the mythical ancestor of the Armenians) of the Bagratids supposed by others, calling such assertions “foolish” (լիմար բանը).

Then, in various parts of his *History*, Movsēs develops the story of the Bagratids being Jews, for which they were at times persecuted by Armenian kings. King “Vałaršak” (presumably, a king of Armenia in the early Parthian period or else Trdat I), who had made the family of another Šambat Bagarat, a descendant of Nebuchadnezzar’s contemporary, the coronants of the Armenian Arsacids and given them the name Bagratuni (2.3), begs him “with forceful words” to deny Judaism and worship idols. However, when Šambat refuses, the king tolerates his adherence to the Jewish religion (II.8).

Vałaršak’s son and successor, Aršak, turns out to be more intolerant and cruel (2.9). “He persecuted the sons of Bagarat,” Movsēs writes,

in an effort to make them worship idols. Two of them bravely died by the sword for their ancestral customs. I am not ashamed to call them followers of the companions of Anania and Eleazar.¹⁶³ But the others accepted this much only: to ride out to hunt or to war on the Sabbath and to leave their children uncircumcised when they were born—for they were unmarried. And it was commanded by Aršak that they should not be given wives from any of the princely houses unless they made an oath to abandon circumcision. They accepted only these two conditions, but not the worship of idols.

Then Movsēs states that this was the last part of his book, which was based on Mar Abas Catina.

Similar forceful actions against the Bagratids are taken by the “Middle Tigran” (presumably, Tigran II). When the Bagratids do not agree to offer sacrifices on the altars set up by Tigran in front of temples, he orders the tongue of one of them, named Asud, to be cut out. The other Bagratids agree to eat the meat from Tigran’s sacrifices, even pork, though they decline to sacrifice and worship themselves. Therefore, the king’s punishment is partial: they are

deprived of the command of the army but remain the coronants of the Arsacids (2.14).

Further persecution of a Bagratid, this time by another Armenian king figuring in Movsēs's *History*, Aršam, is referred to in chapter 2.24. This Bagratid is named Enanos. Movsēs narrates a story connected with the high priest Hyrcanus, brought captive to Armenia, as he says, by the Middle Tigran's commander Barzap'ran Rštuni (see pp. 33–35). Aršam is exasperated at the coronant Enanos, who has freed Hyrcanus from captivity. Enanos tries to calm the king's anger, saying that Hyrcanus promised a ransom of one hundred talents for his freedom. Enanos's brother, Senekia, is sent to Judea to bring the money, but Herod kills Hyrcanus, and when Aršam learns that no ransom will arrive, he deprives Enanos of the coronant's rank and imprisons him. Then, executing one of Enanos's relatives, Saria, before his eyes, the king threatens also to kill Enanos's sons, Sap'atia and Azaria, if he does not abandon Judaism and worship the sun and idols. The frightened Enanos and all his family agree, and he is restored to the coronant's rank.

In chapter 2.33 of Movsēs's *History*, Tobias ("Tubiay" in the Armenian original), "the Jewish prince, who, they say, was of the Bagratuni" family, is mentioned. He had escaped from Aršam's persecution and had not denied the Jewish religion "until his conversion to Christ." In Edessa, Movsēs informs us, the Apostle Thaddeus entered his house.

Finally, in chapter 2.63, telling a story about Trdat Bagratuni, "a spirited and powerful man, short in stature and ugly in appearance," Movsēs lists some "Jewish" names of the Bagratids, which, according to him, had become "barbaric" (իսթալաւն) after they had renounced Judaism: Bagadia—Bagarat; Asud—Ašot; Vazaria—Varaz; and Šambat—Smbat.¹⁶⁴

How should this evidence on the Jewish origin of the Bagratids be evaluated? It can be neither fully refuted nor accepted uncritically, because there are no reliable sources that corroborate or contradict what we are told by Movsēs. The claim that the Bagratids

were Jews by origin was probably raised by the Bagratids themselves and consequently reflected in the work of the historian of their family, Movsēs Xorenac'i. Scholars have tried to find logical explanations for the issue; the most interesting one was suggested by Nicholas Adontz¹⁶⁵ (in 1908) on the basis of Joseph Markwart's remarks.¹⁶⁶ That explanation is derived from the testimony in Appian's *Syrian Wars* (8.48–49) about Tigran II, that he “conquered all of the Syrian peoples this side of the Euphrates as far as Egypt. He took Cilicia at the same time (for this was also subject to the Seleucids) and put his general, Magadates, in command of all these conquests for fourteen years.” From the two *variae lectiones* in the manuscripts of Appian's work, Μαγαδάτης and Βαγαδάτης, the latter, according to Markwart and Adontz, is the correct one. Βαγαδάτης is the initial form of the Armenian name Բագարատ (Bagarata from Bagaḍata:¹⁶⁷ “given by god,” *baga*, and *data* = the Greek Θεόδωρος), before the interchange of the consonants δ > r. Tigran's general of that name, Adontz believes, was undoubtedly the ancestor of the Bagratids. Furthermore, since he was appointed governor of Syria inhabited by Semites, this may explain the alleged Jewish pedigree of the coronant family. As an additional argument for this supposition, Adontz refers to the anonymous writing attached to Sebēos's *History*,¹⁶⁸ where the province Angel tun (Angelene), in the south of Armenia toward the Syrian border, is mentioned as the domain of the Bagratids.

Cyril Toumanoff, in accordance with his negative attitude toward Movsēs Xorenac'i as a source, is mistrustful of the evidence in question.¹⁶⁹ Again based on Markwart, he states that “Pseudo-Moses must have been struck by a series of near-homophones in Josephus,” namely, by the mention of Ananus, son of Bagadus in the *BJ* (5.531) and of Archelaus, son of Magadates, figuring together with him in another passage (*BJ* 6.229). They were contemporaries of Titus, as well as of Ananelus (Josephus, *AJ* 15.22), upon whom Herod the Great bestowed the high priesthood after killing Hyrcanus. Correlating these names with the memories

of Bagadates, Viceroy of Syria, Movsēs must have “evolved a composite and imaginary personage,” Enanos the Bagratid. But this conjecture of Markwart, repeated by Toumanoff, is hardly convincing. Of Josephus’s works, Movsēs knew only the *War*.¹⁷⁰ He was not familiar with the *AJ* and, consequently, he could not have known of Ananelus.¹⁷¹ Besides, the story about Enanos has almost no parallels with that narrated by Josephus about Ananelus. As to Ananus, according to Josephus’s characterization, “the most bloodthirsty of Simon’s lieutenants” (τῶν Σίμωνος δορυφόρων ὁ φοινικώτατος), and Magadates, the father of Ananus’s companion Archelaus, contemporaries of Titus (emperor of Rome 79–81 CE), they have nothing to do with Enanos. He, as Movsēs says, had freed from captivity the high priest Hyrcanus (put to death by Herod in 30 BCE) and was persecuted by Aršam. Further, Toumanoff refers to another remark of Markwart: the Bagratid *praenomina* that Movsēs derives from “the Hebrew names Bagadia (Bagath), Shambat or Shambay, Asud, Azaria or Vazaria,” are “typically Iranoid.” In his turn, Toumanoff adds that the Hebrew claim was later on adopted and, in a much-embellished form, developed by the Iberian cousins of the Armenian Bagratids. This observation of Toumanoff’s suggests that the theory was quite widespread and could hardly have been simply invented by Movsēs.¹⁷²

Neusner¹⁷³ tries to find a scintilla of truth in Movsēs Xorenacī’s stories, though he states that “we have no basis whatever on which to evaluate their historical reliability.” He associates the name Šambat, from which Movsēs derives Smbat, the beloved name of the Bagratunis, with the Levite name Shabbethai (Nehemiah 8:7 and 11:16) = the Greek Σαββᾶθαι. Then Neusner explains the passage about Tigran II forcing the Bagratid prince to abandon Judaism by his need for the alliance of a powerful Jewish satrap when he was about to conquer Syria: nothing would secure the faithfulness of Tigran’s ally better than the satrap’s readiness to worship the local gods. It was important for the Armenians, who were new Christians, Neusner states, also to participate in Israelite

history “in the flesh, as they did after the spirit.” This is why the Jewish claim of one of the leading princely families was willingly accepted and propagated.

Robert Thomson¹⁷⁴ regards Movsēs’s information as a complete fraud perpetrated for certain purposes. According to Thomson, he derived the name Bagarat itself “from the P’ak’arat of Nehemiah 7:59,” one of Nebuchadnezzar’s Jewish captives, “and the name Shambat he has invented to account for Smbat, a Bagratid personal name common in his own day.” Movsēs’s purposes, Thomson says, were, first, to corroborate the Bagratid’s claim to ancient pedigree and social prominence (Šambat, freed by Nebuchadnezzar, “enjoying an honorable position a thousand years before the time Moses claims to be writing”). Further, by the stories about the kings making vain efforts to force the Bagratids to worship idols, the religious steadfastness of the Bagratids is established. Finally, by the mention of Tobias being converted to Christianity in Edessa by Thaddeus, Movsēs emphasizes that his Bagratuni patrons have a more ancient claim to an association with the first apostles than the other leading princely family of Armenia, the Mamikonids, though the latter had married into the house of St. Gregory the Illuminator.

From this brief summary of views expressed on the issue, the earlier statement becomes clearer: Movsēs’s narrative about “Bagratids the Jews” can be treated only by mere reasoning, since there is no surviving evidence from other sources that could support, confirm, or refute these data. Scholars have made speculative remarks congruent to their own purposes and their general attitude toward Movsēs Xorenac’i, the historian of the Bagratuni family. While Markwart and especially Adontz, in accordance with their moderate positions, have attempted to suggest possible explanations without any *tendenz*, Toumanoff and Thomson have assessed the relevant passages in the context of their overall criticism of Movsēs’s work, and Neusner, since he wanted to prove that Jews were living in pagan Armenia, has in certain cases chosen to believe the stories. In the end, it is impossible to draw a final

conclusion, and no one can be sure of the Jewish or Armenian descent of the Bagratids.

This is also true regarding Movsēs's testimony on another noble family of Armenia, the Amatunis,¹⁷⁵ to whom he also ascribes Jewish origin (2.57):

The family of the Amatunik' came from the eastern regions of the land of the Aryans. But they are by origin Jewish, descended by a certain Manue,¹⁷⁶ whose son was . . . called Samson, as is the Jewish custom to call [children] after the names of their ancestors. . . . They were taken there by Aršak, the first king of the Parthians, and in the regions of Hamadan in the land of the Aryans they were promoted to a position of honor. What the reasons for their coming here might be, I do not know. . . . And some Persians call them Manuean after the name of their ancestor.¹⁷⁷

Hamadan (Ahmatan in Movsēs Xorenac'i) is Ecbatana,¹⁷⁸ the capital of Media, where, so Movsēs believes, the Amatuni family had been settled in the early Parthian period. Later, when Trajan was emperor of Rome (cf. 2.55),¹⁷⁹ the Amatuni family had migrated to Armenia for an unspecified reason. Neusner¹⁸⁰ has attempted to identify the Amatunis with the royal family of Adiabene converted to Judaism (see earlier discussion). He is sure that Manue "obviously" is the Armenian form of Monobazes (more correctly, Monobazus, Μονοβάζος), "which exists also in Parthian; the Parthian form is M^aN^aW^aZ." Consequently, Neusner asserts, Manue and Monobazes, the father of King Izates, or Izates's brother, also called Monobazes, could have been the same person. After Trajan's invasion, the descendants of Manue-Monobazes possibly had to flee to the east, to Ecbatana, the summer capital of the Parthians, and then to take refuge in Armenia. Neusner's hypothesis is interesting but hardly persuasive.¹⁸¹ He gives no explanation of how the biblical name Manue (Manoah, Μανωε),

the name of Samson's father, as Movsēs explicitly says, could be the Armenian form of Monobazes. Besides, he clearly notes that the Amatunis were settled "in the regions of Hamadan" by Aršak I (247–217 BCE), the founder of the Parthian kingdom, and not in the time of Trajan's eastern campaign, when, after having lived in their former homeland for centuries, they came to Armenia. Thus, unfortunately, as in the case of the Bagratids, the question of whether or not the legend about the Jewish extraction of the Amatunis contains any historical truth remains open.

2.13 Jews Converted to Christianity in Armenia

We have already mentioned the Bagratid Tobias, who, according to Movsēs Xorenac'i (2.33), had become Christian in the days of the Apostle Thaddeus. In addition to this converted Jew, Movsēs refers to many other Jewish converts to Christianity in chapter 3.35.¹⁸² Witnessing to the invasion of the Persian troops into Armenia circa 368/9 CE and the destruction of three cities, he reports that they took captive the "Jews living by the same Jewish law in Van Tosp whom Barzap'ran Rštuni had brought there in the days of Tigran," as well as "the Jews in Artašat and Vałaršapat whom the same king Tigran had brought there and who in the days of Saint Gregory and Trdat had believed in Christ." The Jews from Van, who had not abandoned their ancestral laws, were settled in Isfahan.¹⁸³ As to the others who, as Movsēs states, had embraced Christianity, he does not specify the place where they were taken by Šhāpūr's army. Instead, he adds another piece of information, about a Jew converted to Christianity, Zuit'ay, the elder (łrłg) of Artašat. He is slandered before Šhāpūr that "he had come with the captives to urge them to adhere firmly to the Christian religion." Šhāpūr orders Zuit'ay to be tortured so that he will renounce his faith, but the elder refuses to do so and is martyred.

The same person, Zuit' by name, also figures in P'awstos's *History* (4.55–57), in connection with the same events, the conquest of the Armenian cities by the Persians during which both Armenians and Jews were taken captive. The Persians suggest Zuit' going away, but the elder of Artasat answers that “it is not fitting that the shepherd abandon his flock.” He is taken to Persia, and Shāpūr II orders him to accept the religion of the Magi. Zuit' prefers death and is beheaded. P'awstos does not say that Zuit' was a converted Jew and that in the days of Gregory the Illuminator and Trdat III, that is, as a result of the official Christianization of Armenia in the early fourth century, the Jews of Artasat and Vałaršapat had come to believe in Christ. However, that is what Movsēs Xorenac'i's version of the story implies.

There is information in Agat'angelos (§781) about the conversion of the pagan priests of the goddess Anahit's temple in Artasat. That sanctuary was ruined, and “the (temple's) property and servants with the pagan priests and their lands and territories” were “devoted to the church's service.” However, Agat'angelos knows nothing about Jews in Artasat converted to Christianity.

Thus, once again, we are dealing with evidence found only in Movsēs Xorenac'i, which can neither be confirmed nor refuted by other available sources. It cannot be excluded that there were Christianized Jews in Armenia, but, due to the lack of any firm corroborative material, one can only speculate on this matter.

2.14 Linguistic Issues: Possible Hebrew Words in Armenian

Another type of evidence for Jewish settlement in Armenia might be the existence of loanwords from Hebrew in Armenian. To find such words, we reviewed all the borrowings from North West Semitic languages presented by Hübschmann in the section

of his *Altarmenische Grammatik* dealing with loanwords from Syriac.¹⁸⁴ The absence of such loanwords would prove nothing, but their presence could be probative.¹⁸⁵ Syriac, an Aramaic dialect, is linguistically rather close to Hebrew. For our inquiry, the existence in Armenian of word forms that are possible in both Syriac and Hebrew proves nothing of their specific origin. The most likely candidates for an unambiguous Hebrew origin are two words ending in *-ut*‘. These two words, if understood as Syriac, would have to be construct states¹⁸⁶ of words, the last root letter of which is *-y*. Yet the nouns borrowed from Syriac (Aramaic) are overwhelmingly in either the definite state, and so end in *-a(y)*, such as *k’ahana* and *šuk’a*, or in the absolute state, which has no distinctive ending. The ending *-ut* is found on only two words of those listed by Hübschmann, *galut*‘ “exile, exiled community” and *xanut*‘ “shop.” Both these forms are normal in Hebrew, in which language they are not in the construct but are in the absolute state. However, they could equally be the construct form of roots ending in *-y* in Syriac.¹⁸⁷ Admittedly, the rarity of Armenian borrowings of words in the construct state might weigh in favor of Hebrew. These two instances would be the only cases of borrowing from Hebrew, while there is at least one further instance of the borrowing of a Syriac noun in the construct state even though the construct itself is rare in Syriac.¹⁸⁸ That noun, *qqup* *gzat*‘ “fleece,” in the construct state (in *-at*) is not homographic with a Hebrew form.¹⁸⁹ Regardless, Hebrew played no clearly discernable role in the development of Armenian vocabulary.¹⁹⁰

Dan Shapira has used fairly complex criteria to attempt to isolate different layers of borrowing of Aramaic words into Armenian.¹⁹¹ His conclusion is the same as that proposed here, that “there hardly was any direct linguistic impact of Jewish Semitic languages on Armenian,” and he adds that some apparently Judaizing Aramaic elements were transmitted through Syriac influences at very early stages of Armenian Christianization.¹⁹²

2.15 The Word for “Jew” in Armenian

The normal designation for “Jew” in Armenian is հրե/էայ “hre/ēay.” This word is to be found in fifth-century sources and from then on. Its etymology is not immediately clear. In *NBHL*, the standard lexicon of Ancient Armenian, the word is said to be derived from Hebrew יְהוּדִי *yěhûdî*. The derivation of *hre/ēay* from *yěhûdî* is not self-evident, nor does this great lexicon venture an explanation.

Hrač‘ya Ačaiyan, in his fine Armenian etymological dictionary, suggests that հրեայ derives from *հրօրեայ, presumably with the regular Armenian reduction of unstressed *-u-*, which he then compares, appropriately, with Georgian *huria* and similar forms in other Caucasian languages. That Caucasian form, in turn, Ačaiyan regards as deriving from *yěhûdî*, and so on, but he offers no explanation of how the form with the *r* instead of *d* arose.¹⁹³ Professor Shaul Shaked remarked to me some years ago that a shift from *d* > *r* took place in a number of Iranian dialects, as, more recently, Dan Shapira has also noted.¹⁹⁴

I wish to observe, however, the fact that this word form is shared by the oldest attested level of Armenian and Georgian (and other Caucasian languages), which indicates its antiquity. In all likelihood it can be related to an encounter with Jews in the Caucasian peninsula in the period before these languages were written. Therefore, the word form constitutes a mute witness to early Jewish settlement in the Caucasus, though Armenia proper cannot be specified. This bears out James Russell’s general remarks quoted in section 2.1 of the present work.

2.16 Concluding Remarks

Were there Jewish inhabitants in Armenia from the first century BCE to the fifth century CE? In all probability yes, because there is

no reason to doubt the gist of what is reported by P'awstos Buzand and Movsēs Xorenac'i. We cannot form any idea about the approximate number of those Jews, but it seems to have been significant. Furthermore, we should accept that most of them were brought to Armenia by Tigran II. The mass deportations in his time of various peoples, very likely including Jews, are corroborated by Greco-Roman sources. Moreover, the anachronistic mention of the high priest Hyrcanus and other Jews coming with him to Armenia permits us to infer that in the days of Tigran's successor, Artawazd II, as well, a certain number of Jews became residents of Armenian cities. Given the great numbers of the Jewish settlers indicated by P'awstos, we conjecture that "Jews" (հրեայք) in Armenian tradition, as elsewhere, meant not only the ethnos but also "sympathizers of the Jewish religion," "God-fearers," and proselytes.

We cannot be certain about the Jewish origin of the Bagratids or Amatunis, but when dealing with Movsēs Xorenac'i's stories about them, we should note, as relevant to our immediate concern, the following aspect of the many references to հրեայք "Jews" in his *History of Armenia*. Movsēs appears to have specific knowledge in Jewish matters. He compares the death of Bagarat's two sons with the martyrdom of Hannah and Eleazar; he knows that Jews do not eat the meat of pagan sacrifices or pork, that they avoid any activities (in particular, they do not hunt or go to war) on the Sabbath, and that the custom of circumcision is strictly observed by them. He could have been familiar with all this from the Bible,¹⁹⁵ but the fact that he speaks so much about the Jews and their habits might suggest that in his time the "Jewish factor," that is, the presence of Jews and their influence in various spheres, was quite significant in Armenia. Hence we can conclude that even after the captivity of tens of thousands of Jews in 368/9 by the Persians, many Jews continued living in Armenia at least until the end of the fifth century CE. Moreover, in later sources, both Armenian and foreign, there

is evidence about Jewish inhabitants in Armenia in the Middle Ages, the most striking corroboration of this being the recently discovered Jewish cemetery, mainly of the thirteenth century, in the village Ełegis of the Vayoc' Jor province of the Republic of Armenia.¹⁹⁶